

✓ Knights of Labor

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China's Menace to the World.

by Thos. Magee

FROM

THE FORUM.

TO THE PUBLIC.

Wash. D. C.

1878

TO THE PUBLIC:

MEN FROM CHINA come here to do LAUNDRY WORK. The Chinese Empire contains 600,000,000 (six hundred millions) inhabitants.

The supply of these men is inexhaustible.

Every one doing this work takes BREAD from the mouths of OUR WOMEN.

So many have come of late, that to keep at work, they are obliged to cut prices.

And now, we appeal to the public, asking them will they be partners to a deal which is only one of their many onward marches in CRUSHING OUT THE INDUSTRIES OF OUR COUNTRY from our people by grasping them themselves. Will you oblige the AMERICAN LAUNDRIES to CUT THE WAGES OF THEIR PEOPLE by giving your patronage to the CHINAMEN?

We invite you to give a thorough investigation of the STEAM LAUNDRY BUSINESS of the country; in doing so you will find that not only does it GIVE EMPLOYMENT TO A VAST NUMBER OF WOMEN, but a great field of labor is opened to a great number of mechanics of all kinds whose wages are poured back into the trade of the country.

If this undesirable element "THE CHINESE EMIGRANTS" are not stopped coming here, we have no alternative but that we will have California and the Pacific Slope's experience, and the end will be that our industries will be absorbed UNLESS we live down to their animal life.

We say in conclusion that the CHINAMAN is a labor consumer of our country without the adequate returns of prosperity to our land as is given by the labor of our people to our glorious country.

Our motto should be:

OUR COUNTRY, OUR PEOPLE, GOD, AND OUR NATIVE LAND.

*Pioneer Laundry Workers Assembly, K. of L.
Washington, D. C.*

China's Menace to the World.

ONE of the most striking and most useful characteristics of the Chinese is their remarkable ability as farmers. In the United States, if a farmer were to give his son two or three acres of land, and to tell him that he expected him to raise vegetables on this acreage to grow rich, the son would be fully justified in indulging in incredulous laughter. Suppose that, in addition to making his own living, and to paying and feeding a laborer out of the produce of the land, the son were called upon to pay \$25 or \$30 a month rent per acre, would not every one say, "This is impossible"? But it is not—to a Chinaman at least. A year ago I sold for a friend in San Francisco about $2\frac{1}{4}$ acres of land in a western suburb. A Chinaman was occupying it. For this speck of ground he regularly paid \$75 a month, and he lived on it with an assistant. He used it for growing vegetables, which he disposed of to Chinamen. When I sold the lot, the Chinaman had been upon the lot three years, and his lease had two years to run. The buyer desired to fill the lot in and to sell it for building plots, but the Chinaman would not leave. Despite the high rent, he was making money, and he was dispossessed only by an action at law to suppress his business as a nuisance. The Rev. Mr. Vrooman, now Chinese interpreter in the California courts, who was for twenty-five years a missionary at Canton, and was subsequently among the Chinese in Melbourne, informed me that he knew of two Chinese in the latter place who made a living for themselves and for a horse from a quarter of an acre of land. In addition to supporting themselves and the horse, they each sent \$50 yearly to their relatives at home.

In China, the owner of land who should not cultivate it would be deprived of it. Fertilizers undreamed of in Europe are used there, and the nostrils of a European or an American are assailed with all sorts of odors at every turn in city and country. All ordure is penuriously hoarded and used. Every stalk of rice is planted as seed, and replanted in water by human hands, and to add one handful to a crop would not

be thought unworthy of effort. Rain water is everywhere stored in ponds or in water holes for irrigation, and in all cases fish are grown in these reservoirs. Human hands do all the work; human backs bear most of the land burdens; human animals are the beasts that drag most of the loads, where they cannot be transported on canal or river. Horses, cows, and sheep are crowded out; they would cost more than they would produce. Why should a horse or an ass be called to bear a burden when there are poor human beasts to be had, in number sufficient to build the pyramids or to drag mountains from their bases, if the poorest of wages to recompense such a task were forthcoming? There are practically no plant weeds to be seen in the most thickly populated parts of China. There is no room for them, and they are completely extirpated in a land where agriculture is so minute that the roots of plants are examined to expel or to kill any insect or grub that would dare to dispute a living with the hungry lord of creation. Seeds are steeped in liquid manure to force them to rapid and luxuriant growth. Fertilizers are applied directly to the roots of plants, and not placed on the surface of the land, as with us, for in the latter process is evaporation and waste.

Man is the only weed tolerated in China, and he teems everywhere. A population of eight hundred to the square mile is not uncommon in the best agricultural districts there. In that country, if anywhere, missionaries should devote their best energies to urging the practice of the Malthusian doctrine. But to make converts to any method of cutting down the population would be even more difficult than to christianize the Chinese; for the one great religious tenet of a Chinaman, in which he is as much in earnest as he is in working, is the worship of his ancestors. He, in his turn, wants his *manes* worshiped, and, as that cannot be done without children, he prays constantly for sons, daughters being household shadows and household sorrows. Population is checked to some small extent by the murder of female infants. Famine is a constant relief. The overflow of the Yellow River, by drowning and starving, once in about every decade, hundreds of thousands or sometimes one or two millions of people, would be a relief but for the fact that at the same time it destroys immense amounts of property. The Taeping rebellion was a great relief. In China, if anywhere, Wordsworth's assertion that "slaughter is God's daughter," is true

The statement has lately been widely published, that farming lands in such States as New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Ohio, and Illinois, have failed in value from 20 to 50 per cent. within ten or fifteen years. Ex-Senator L. D. Whiting, of Illinois, in an address before a farmers' association at Peoria, estimated the shrinkage in the value of farming lands in Illinois during the past ten years at the enormous figure of \$200,000,000. The Chinese remedy for such a state of affairs would be reduction—immense reduction—of the acreage allowed to each farmer. The Chinaman would not call the American system of raising wheat and corn, on tracts of 160 acres and upward, land culture at all. The constant reduction of the crops each year, from want of rotation and of fertilizing, goes far to support the Chinaman's view of this question. The Chinese, and the Japanese, also, it may be added, are as far ahead of the agriculturists of the United States, in what they can get out of a given area of land, as we are ahead of them in manufacturing and transportation development. We have quite as much to learn of them on the one hand, as they have to learn of us on the other. Let me also add here, that if a proposition in serious business shape should come from any of the States last named to the representatives of the Chinese companies in California, to take long leases of from 50,000 to 200,000 acres of land, the Chinese to cultivate the land, paying all taxes and from five to ten dollars per acre annual rent, I feel reasonably sure that it would be accepted; provided, the Chinese were allowed to come and go freely. Chinese now rent at least 50,000 acres of fruit and bottom lands within a radius of 100 miles of San Francisco, for which they pay from four to ten times what a white lessee could afford to give for the same. Land in their hands is farmed in earnest, and with them its richness increases rather than decreases.

But for the civilized powers, China would at once seize the Sandwich and Philippine Islands by conquest. She is rapidly capturing them in an industrial way. The Chinese are a power as agriculturists, shopkeepers, and financiers, before which the soft and easy-going natives of those islands must give way. Extinction was the doom of the natives of the Sandwich Islands in any event, but their erasure was slow, indeed, compared with the rate at which the Chinese are now displacing them. The Ladrone and Philippine Islands are still owned by Spain. The Chinese have a strong foothold upon the latter, and will finally master the Ladrone, also. As a Conqueror,

China has played a paltry part in history; but as an industrial supplanter and trade-absorber, no nation of the earth can equal her. If picked white workman labor twelve hours a day, the Chinese laborer and mechanic, will, if necessary, learn from them, and overtake them by working twenty hours, and that on incomparably poorer food, housing, and clothing.

Fresh air and sunshine the Chinaman can come nearer to doing wholly without than any other human being. Both seem to be superfluities to him. Chinese passengers on a junk or boat, jam themselves in crowds into little holes of deck houses, where they remain all day in the worst of air and in the most cramped positions. I have seen a Chinaman, while waiting at a railway station, lift himself upon an empty headless, sharp-edged barrel, sit down upon the edge, and, with his feet as a brace across the barrel, fall asleep. To ride across the continent in a freight car, with no opportunity to lie down save on bare boards, would be exceedingly trying to an American; but it would not inconvenience a Chinaman in the least. The Chinaman's ability to bear hunger, and exposure to low temperature in thin clothing, has been frequently noted and described by travelers. He can endure long fasting, the account being subsequently more than balanced by an over-feeding which one would think only an Eskimo or an anaconda could withstand.

A Captain Blethen, who died in San Francisco recently, lived in China for twenty-two years previous to 1880. He kept a large ship-chandlery store at Shanghai, and owned a dry dock there, but sold his business because he was being forced out by Chinese competition. Said he to me :

"The trouble with you here in California is that you do not appreciate the staying powers of the Chinese. When a Chinese laborer comes here, he may, with his best efforts, save only a few dollars the first year; but, let him save little or much, he does and will save, and he will work in and out of season. Here is a letter I received by the last steamer from China. It is from the Chinese house that bought me out. It contains an order for some American goods in the ship-chandlery line. This letter is in the best of English. It was written by a young Chinaman, who manages the firm's business. I gave the man who filled a similar position for me \$3,000 a year. This young Chinaman gets but \$10 a month, his rice, and a place to sleep in. The hands in the store gets no wages, only rice and a bunk. How could I live against such competition? I had either to remain in business there, and thereby lose all I had made, or to sell out at a good price and leave. This process is going on at all the ports in China. White men employed and taught the Chinese, and the Chinese drove them out. We could no more compete with them than we could overcome death and fate."

This is the one unvarying story everywhere. Let white men, in competition with Chinese, mark down wages and profits as they may, extend the hours of labor or reduce the food standard as they may, the Chinese, without seeming effort or privation, can at once get below them and work them out.

The Chinese have been largely employed in the fruit-packing business in San Francisco. That has been one of the largest, most useful, and most profitable of our industries. They have heretofore figured in it only as employees, but last year they began to operate extensively on their own account, and at a time of greater depression than was ever before known in the business. There was such an over-supply of fruit that any one giving a large order could almost dictate the price. At such a crisis the Chinese entered the business, and they are now advancing rapidly in it. And they will continue to advance, for Chinese employers practice the co-operative system, and thus get much better work out of Chinese laborers than Americans possibly can. For the money they advance, Chinese employers charge two per cent. a month, and they command, also, high salaries for their services. After these fixed charges have been provided for, then co-operation comes in. Chinese masters have the mental keenness to know that a co-operative laborer is a laborer with heart in his work, and that the heart is the very best spur to diligent hands.

The Chinese have recently secured a foothold in Lower California, 60 miles below the California State line, on a grant 125 miles square. No use was made of this land till some speculators at San Diego, while floating everything on paper there, transferred it to a joint-stock company. The shares had only a nominal value until a very sharp Chinaman appeared. He and his Chinese associates demanded and received a little more than half of the shares, in order that the control should be in Chinese hands. All of the shares will finally be owned by them. The Chinese guarantee to build a canal 75 miles long, the water of which is to be used for placer gold-washing and for irrigation. But much more important than that is a twenty years' concession, already granted by a Franciscan, of the sole rite to fish in the waters of the Gulf of California. He has turned this rite over to the Chinese. When the Chinese thus purchase territories, or get long leases of them, they pay but a trifle of money down. Payment of the great bulk of the purchase price is deferred until the amount can be taken out of the country, through profits from agriculture,

mining, and fishing, made by the laborers, who will be imported from China. One of the parties interested in the scheme has gone to China to import 8,000 Chinese into that part of Mexico.

Neither Cuban and South American planters and mine-owners, nor manufacturers in San Francisco, will any longer grow wealthy by the importation of coolies; long headed Chinese merchants and contractors will usurp their places, and will make the money themselves. For twenty years after the introduction of coolies, California manufacturers grew rich by employing Chinese labor. Now the tables are turned. Chinese employ Chinese, and are beating white employers on every hand in the manufacture of cigars, boots, shoes, slippers, men's clothing, and men's and women's underwear. It may be set down as a rule, almost without exception, that no one can make anything out of the Chinaman except during his apprenticeship. He serves only to learn, that he may finally become master, in which position he will supplant his teachers, no matter how strongly they may be backed by capital and experience. By his industry, suavity and apparent child-like innocence, seconded by unequalled patience and the keenest business ability, the Chinaman is always the winner. Let white men set over him whatever guards they may, he can surpass them in threading the by-ways of tortuosness. Dr. S. Wells Williams, in his standard work on China, "The Middle Kingdom," makes these remarks on the untruthfulness of the Chinese :

"There is nothing which tries one so much, when living among them, as their disregard of truth; or renders him so indifferent to what calamities may befall so mendacious a race. An abiding impression of suspicion rests upon the mind toward everybody here, which chills the warmest wishes for their welfare. Their better traits diminish in the distance, and the patience is exhausted when in daily proximity and friction with this ancestor of sins."

China is not yet a large manufacturer, but the signs in that direction are so promising that Prince Kung was lately reported to have said that fifty years hence China would manufacture for the world. The prejudice of the Chinese against machinery is fast being overcome. The fact is, China is coming out into the world. Her initial efforts in that direction have been eminently profitable to her, and very decidedly unprofitable to all who have employed her emigrating representatives. Let the Chinaman emigrate where he will, he never

goes to stay away permanently from his native country. He sends or carries back to China all of his savings. The Chinese are therefore, a fearful drain, in a monetary sense, upon any country to which they emigrate. The chief profits made from the Chinese sojourners here and elsewhere are due to the fact that, as the Chinaman never comes to stay, he does not buy land. Being a very filthy and undesirable tenant, he is always charged far more rent than a white man would have to pay for the same land or premises. He could avoid this by purchasing; but he will not do so, even when he is rich. White owners of the Chinese quarter in San Francisco receive from 9 to 12 per cent., net, from their property. Owners with white tenants receive only from 5 to 7 per cent. While the Chinese lessee pays from 9 to 12 per cent., net, to his landlord, he receives from 18 to 24 per cent., net, himself, by sub-letting. This he accomplishes by the most fearful over-crowding. In one four story building, on a lot $34\frac{1}{2}$ by $137\frac{1}{2}$ feet in size, more than 200 Chinese are housed.

I lately asked a rich Chinese merchant how his countrymen manage to distance white men so far in land culture. "Oh," said he, "white man too lazy. Chinaman work all day and all night too, when moon is shining." And this is true. If the Chinese here or wherever else their labor is profitable, had the continuous daylight of arctic Summer, they would every day work at least twenty hours. Lights never seem to go out in Chinese laundries by night. Probably no man on the face of the earth gives so little time to sleep as the Chinaman.

It has been well said that, compared to the Chinese code of laws, the Persian Zendavesta and the Hindoo Purana are but ravings. Says a writer in the "Edinburgh review.":

"To turn from the latter to the former, is like passing from darkness to light; from the drivings of dotage to the exercise of an improved understanding. We scarcely know a European code that is so freed from intricacy, bigotry, and fiction."

No European cabinet minister would dare to talk to his sovereign with the freedom indulged in by the Chinese Emperor's advisers, when the good of the people and common sense require them to ignore his pretensions to be the "Son of Heaven." A more remarkable and most creditable fact is that there is only one order of hereditary nobility in China—the descendants of Confucius. He lived 500 years before Christ; and yet to this day, through all the changes and chances of time and of dynasties, the descendants of Confucius remain the only

hereditary noblemen and national pensioners in the empire. Even the imperial blood becomes dilated, degraded, and absorbed into the body politic after the seventh generation; but the descendants of Confucius remain separate, through all the mutations of time and of government. It is as if Greece were able to point to the living descendants in the direct line of Socrates, Plato, Pericles, or Phidias, still setting them up as the only permanent aristocracy, and still supporting them at the expense of the State. China may be forgiven much for thus making immortal the memory of her great philosopher. When Europe stormed at the gates of the Chinese Empire and demanded their opening, China, physically weak, could not successfully resist; but she fought with the weapons of deceit, and achieved some remarkable successes by the able exercise of diplomatic lying. These did not save her, it is true, but they lightened her fall. China's progress will be even more remarkable in internal manufacturing development than in industrial and mercantile triumphs over people in other countries. The United States minister to China has recently reported as follows to the State Department at Washington:

"I have the honor to inclose an imperial decree, commenting on the late proposal of the viceroy of Canton to develop the iron industry in Tokuang. In order to foster this important industry, he has abolished inland duties on iron and the prohibition against its export. He proposes to investigate by commission the subject of abolishing the heavy duty now levied on furnaces. Such a plan put into force for three years could not involve a large diminution of the revenue, but would greatly benefit the iron-producers by doing away with illegal fees. He proposes, also, to create a joint-stock company to work the foundries with foreign machinery. It would seem that the mind of this distinguished man, Chang Chi Yung, had undergone a change. He now, while still materially seeking to retain for his own people the benefits of industrial enterprise, favors the extensive use of foreign methods in building railroads and in establishing electric lights and foundries. I do not doubt that the next process in his mental development will lead him to the only correct conclusion; that is to say, that foreign talent, honesty, and will power are indispensable to the successful introduction of improvements."

A concession for a railroad, to run from Peking to Chin Kiang, on the Yang-tse-Kiang, 600 miles south of Peking, has also been granted. The development of the mineral and manufacturing resources of China to anything like the degree which both have attained in such a State as Pennsylvania would relieve the soil from the burden of having to sustain fully one-half, and probably two-thirds, of the total population of that fearfully over-populated empire. No internal development, however, will fully relieve the continuous pressure

of over-population; and, therefore, outside of China, beyond all questions, the Chinese must find room for themselves. China is no longer shut; China is open, and China's only grievance may be that the world, in its turn, may build an anti-Chinese legal wall against the entrance of her innumerable industrial armies. The world does not know much about China yet; it will soon, however, make more of her acquaintance. She has been hidden in the night of exclusion, oriental sleep, and mental stagnation; she is emerging into the daylight of progress, and toward an activity such as the modern world has never seen. China has been ignorantly despised; but China is worthy of all respect. She is quickly throwing off the clogs of her progress, and is rapidly coming up with the open world in the race of life, with advantages in her favor that cannot well be surpassed. The man who can run for a few minutes in a short race, and make very fast time, is not the equal of him who can run all day. The Chinese are all-day runners, and those who compete with them will need to rise early and sit up late. China has untiring industrial ability, unsurpassed staying powers, and a degree of patience which no other nation can pretend to equal. Friend and enemy of China should know these facts. Few do know them.

THOMAS MAGEE.

